

Advocate

News for Chicago Metro Area Foster Parents

Chicago Family Wins National Adoption Excellence Award

After a decade of fostering and adopting, Carmelo and Nydia Sanchez have won the Adoption Excellence Award for Family Contribution from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The national award honors individuals and organizations that provide loving families and homes to abandoned, neglected or abused children.

It all began when Nydia saw a television commercial featuring waiting children. The Sanchezes stopped just thinking about foster care and picked up the phone to get started. Their first placement was a set of one-year-old twins. They were shortly followed by two-year-old twins from the same family.

"We would go out, and they all looked like a line of little ducklings behind me, especially when you added in our two young birth kids," remembers Nydia.

Since those early days, the Sanchezes have fostered more than 15 children and have adopted five. Nydia confesses that she and her husband were pretty green when they started. "We hardly knew what we were doing.

We just knew that we loved kids and wanted to help," she said.

The Association House foster care agency gave them help and support along the way. As the children grew up and as the Sanchezes started taking older



DCFS Director Jess McDonald and Gov. George H. Ryan congratulate Carmelo and Nydia Sanchez on winning the National Adoption Excellence Award.

children, the agency provided a behaviorist who helped with discipline and behavior problems. Soon they were taking in some of the most difficult cases.

"It seemed like every child who got a 14-day notice came to our house. We just loved them and, like a puzzle, tried to figure out how to sooth and comfort them. Eventually, something would click," said Nydia.

With time, experience and support, the Sanchezes help others explore foster parenting and adoption. Now that the children are older, Nydia is working outside the home, still doing what she knows best, as a family resource worker at the

Adoption Information Center of Illinois. She talks to prospective adoptive parents to help match them with children waiting for adoption. Much of her own experience comes into play as she works with families who have a lot of the same questions she had.

"The best advice I can give is to keep the lines of communication open with the caseworkers. Good communication is important if you are going to get good results. If you aren't comfortable with an answer, keep asking until you understand and are satisfied," Nydia recommends.

The recognition from the Adoption Excellence Award was hardly expected, but is truly appreciated. Both Carmelo and Nydia hope their story will inspire other foster parents to keep trying when times are hard and encourage more families to adopt.

Illinois Adoptions Exceed Number of Foster Kids for First Time

At the end of last year, DCFS reported that for the first time more previous foster children were living with adoptive parents or legal guardians than in foster homes or other substitute care. More than 32,000 foster children had moved to permanent homes compared to 30,000 children in substitute care.

A key to that, according to DCFS, was the move to make the adoption and guardianship subsidy payments equal to those in foster care. This enabled an incentive for more families to decide to adopt children they were fostering. As a result, 6,281 children became part of permanent families in 2000. Overall, in just three years, DCFS reduced the number of children in foster care from more than 51,000 to less than 28,000.

Illinois ranked first in placing children in permanent homes. For its success in moving children to adoptive homes, DCFS received bonus funding from United States Department of Health and Human Services in each of the last two years. These bonuses are made as result of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which called upon states to tighten timeframes for moving children into adoptive homes when they cannot return to their homes of origin. Illinois is using this funding to increase post

adoption service to families who have adopted or become guardians and to lower caseloads so that workers can better focus on permanency.

"This is wonderful news and a tremendous accomplishment," Governor George H. Ryan

said. "This is an opportunity to remind everyone that there are children out there who are looking for a permanent place to call home."

Among the 50 states, Illinois has been first in adoptions for three consecutive years. Illinois is also recognized as having one of the most generous subsidy programs. This becomes important because most Illinois families that adopt foster children earn less than \$75,000 annually and many have incomes below \$40,000. The subsidies for adoption and legal guardianship have the two-fold benefit of helping families raise children in permanent

situations and costs the state less than keeping them in foster care.

"Recognition from peers and the federal government is gratifying," DCFS Director Jess McDonald said. "But we must never lose sight of our central motivation-meeting the needs of abused and neglected children.



DCFS Director Jess McDonald announces Illinois' first place ranking in national adoptions.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendar!!! The third annual "You Make the Difference and Cook North Cares" Foster Parent Appreciation Luncheon for DCFS foster or relative caretakers will be held on Saturday, May 19th, from 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Planning for this annual event has just begun. If you are interested in participating on the luncheon planning committee, please contact Tarsha Walton at 312-328-2481.



Statewide Reps needed

We are looking for two dedicated, hard-working individuals to represent the Cook North Region on the Statewide Foster Care Council. Our current representatives, Pam O'Grady and Idalyia Jones will end their terms this summer, with our thanks for all of their hard work!

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council works with DCFS to ensure Department policies and practices reflect the interests of foster children and their foster parents. Recently, DCFS sent a letter to licensed foster parents within the region discussing our need to identify two representatives on the Council. Foster parents were asked to submit information back to the region so that interviews could be scheduled and candidates selected by Director McDonald.

Minimally, to be considered for the position, candidates must:

- hold a valid DCFS foster care license,
- be willing to volunteer to represent the region,
- attend bi-monthly council meetings,
- participate on various working committees,
- attend the monthly regional foster care advisory council meetings; and
- participate in the Regional Foster Parent Resolution Panel for grievances as needed.

The Statewide Advisory Council has helped make important changes to benefit foster families. You can be a part of shaping policy to benefit the children you care for. If you are interested in more information, please contact Pam O'Grady at 773-545-7093.

Get to Know Your Local Area Network

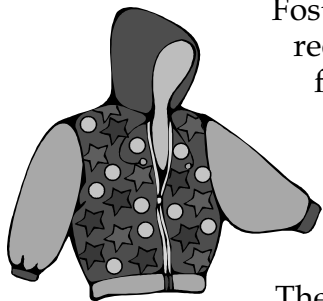
In our continuing effort to help foster parents become more knowledgeable about their Local Area Network (LAN), this month we are going to give you information on LAN 38a. LAN 38a serves the Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Mt. Prospect, Prospect Heights and Wheeling communities.

Steering committee meetings are held the third Monday of every month at Omni Youth Services at 1111 Lake Cook Rd. in Buffalo Grove at 9:00 a.m.

LAN 38a offers an adoption support program and Healthy Families Program through Shelter Inc. at 847-255-8060 and a parent mentoring program through Omni House 847-353-1550.

For more information on these programs or other resources available in LAN 38a, contact the LAN liaison, Joanne Nett at 773-866-5500.

Clothing and More Pantry (C.a.M.P) Program up and running



Foster Parent Support Specialists in the Cook North Region have reopened the clothing closet. The purpose of the program is to serve foster or biological families that are in need of clothing, or other miscellaneous personal care items (ie., school uniform exchanges, diapers, toiletries, toys, baby furniture, etc). The Clothing and More Pantry provides a structured opportunity for sharing available resources free of charge to our families.

The C.a.M.P. program is open to foster families, intact families and relative caretakers residing in the Cook North region or caring for Cook North children. The closet is open every Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. However, the Lead Support Specialists Mattie Brown and Kathy Bilbo, may access the closet at any time to provide support to families experiencing crisis. If you have any questions about the program or wish to volunteer or make donations, please contact Desi Benbenek at 847-692-6926.



**COOK
NORTH**

Cook North Education Advisors are Ready to Help

Don't forget a valuable educational resource available to all foster parents. The regional Educational Advisors are available to you when you have questions about the educational rights of the children placed in your home. You may call them to discuss your concerns, and when necessary, the educational advisor will assign a volunteer education advocate to attend school staffings with you on behalf of the foster/adoptive child placed in your home. Following are the Cook North Educational Advisors:

Nancy Hablutzel, Cook North	(312) 328-2477
Desiree Edwards, Cook North Suburbs	(312) 328-2673
Mitch Kremer, Cook North Suburbs	(773) 866-5534

An Involved Foster Parent Leads to a Successful Student

DCFS procedures suggest that foster parents be involved in a student's school life by:

- ✓ assisting with homework
- ✓ attending parent/teacher conferences
- ✓ picking up report cards
- ✓ encouraging participation in extracurricular activities
- ✓ advocating for a child receiving special education services

Foster parent involvement can result in:

- ✓ higher grades and test scores
- ✓ better attendance and behavior
- ✓ more homework completion
- ✓ greater likelihood of acceptance to college

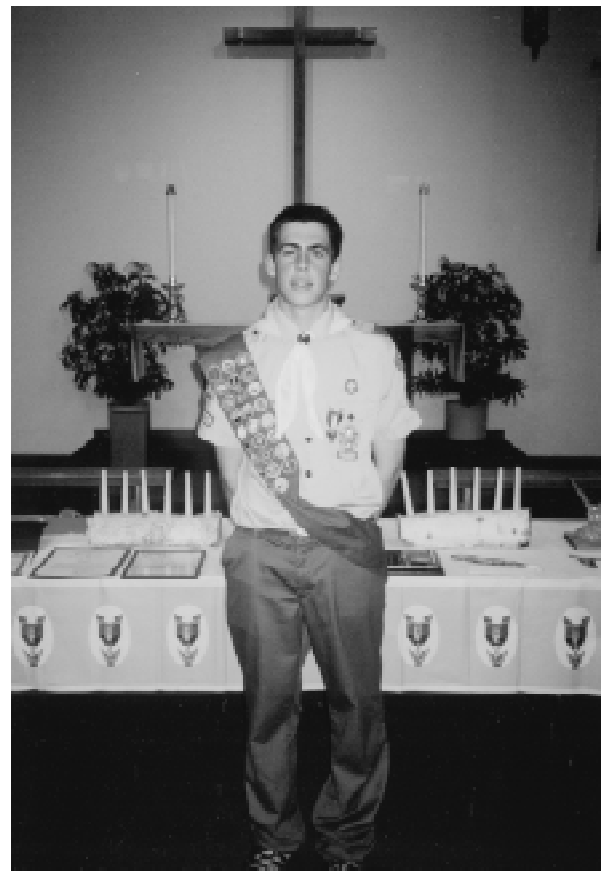
As parents become more involved, their children are less likely to have problems with alcohol or violence.

by Chicago Panel on School Policy

Youth Donates Suitcase Bonanza to Cook Central Children

In an effort to earn his Eagle Scout Merit Badge, Brian Voss, 16, solicited suitcase donations for our foster children. Cook Central Region is the benefactor of over 800 suitcases and bags. They have also been shared with Cook South and Cook North regions.

The suitcases were given to foster children who otherwise would have used a plastic bag for lack of a suitcase. Cook Central Region presented Brian with an Appreciation Plaque at his Eagle Ceremony. Brian promises to do another suitcase drive this spring, as his mother reports, "on a grander scale."



You may call Adrienne Welenc at 773-292-7879 for further information.

Health Extravaganza 2000

The HealthCare Consortium of Illinois Health Works of Cook County co-sponsored by DCFS presented Health Extravaganza 2000 in December at the DCFS office at 3301 West Arthington. The event included health screenings and free immunizations. To keep things fun, the event also included food, entertainment, games, raffles and gifts for children. This was a great way to help keep our kids healthy and with up-to-date medical records. For more information on future health events, call: Lamona Fuller at 312-326-5884 Ext. 339.

Wanted: Candidates for the Cook Central Youth Advisory Board

The Cook Central Youth Advisory Board is a wonderful opportunity for young people between the ages of 14 and 21 to develop leadership and advocacy skills. The board meets regularly to discuss issues that are relevant to youth who are in state care. It is open to youth with DCFS and private agencies.

The youth boards were developed to give young people a voice in DCFS policies and procedures that affect them. Members of the board are encouraged to represent, not only themselves, but also other children in state custody. The board meets the third Tuesday of every month from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the DCFS office at 3518 W. Division.

Potential candidates for the board must fill out an application and submit it with three letters of recommendations. For further information contact Frances DeSilva at 773-292-7715.

Cook South Wants to See Children Go to College

Timothy Snowden, the Regional Administrator of Cook South, has established a goal to encourage 50 children to go college to this year. He has challenged each DCFS team in the region to target at least three children from their caseload for college attendance. This challenge includes, but is not limited to giving them assistance in:

- preparing for the national ACT tests
- attending college fairs
- contacting their guidance counselors
- coordinating with current service providers
- completing state and federal grant and scholarship applications

According to Snowden, “Movement to permanency includes assisting children with a career. There is no better way to assist our children with permanency in their lives than to prepare them to become productive adults through a college education.”

The region asks that all Cook South families and staff actively work to motivate our children to reach their full potential. In order for us to end the cycle of poverty, we must equip our children with knowledge.

In Honor of Children’s Achievements

Cook South hosted **The 1999/2000 Children’s Achievement Awards**. This event, which was sponsored by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Cook County Foster Parent Advisory Council, recognized the many achievements of our foster care children. Awards were given to the children not only to recognize their achievements, but also to encourage the continued development of their talents, skills or special abilities.

There were six children from Cook County who received awards. They ranged in age from 11 to 17. The award winners were: Dana Vorbeau, Juwanda Watson, Amanda Campbell, Tashemia Moore, Willie Robinson and Delores Perdue. They were recognized for academic performance, leadership qualities, creative and performing arts and personal achievement. The delighted looks on the faces of the children as they received their awards, were a wonderful sight to see. But, the proud looks on the faces of the foster parents and staff as these children walked up to receive their awards were overwhelming.

The program began with a warm welcome from Timothy Snowden, the Regional Administrator for Cook South. The invocation was led by Mattie Brown, a lead foster parent advocate from Cook North. This was followed by a wonderful dinner, and then the presentation of awards, by Eleanor Short, a lead foster parent advocate from Cook South, and Ann Buckingham, co-chair of the Cook County Advisory Council. The speakers for the program were Addie Hudson, from One Church One Child and Richard Baker, an Education Advisor, who was once a foster child.

Timothy Snowden, the Regional Administrator for Cook South, said, “events like this allow us all to focus on the goals that matter most: safety for children, guidance, love, and education. The most gratifying moment was watching each of the awardees smile and beam with promise as they were being acknowledged and receiving their awards.”

Cook County Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training Call 312-553-5829 or -5830

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children*
(Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture*
(Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 3 - *Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality* (One 3-hour session = 3 training hours)

Module 4 - *Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member*
(Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes*
(Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Impact of Placement on Your Family* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

COOK NORTH

Galewood Church

May 1 & 3 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 7

Mary and Tom Leo and Associates

April 23, 25 & 30 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 6

Epiphany Church

April 3, 5 & 10 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 5

Module

COOK CENTRAL

Maywood Public Library

May 12 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 9

DCFS 3518 W. Division

April 2, 4 & 6 (Mon/Wed/Fri) 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. 6

April 21 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. 7

Module

COOK SOUTH

DCFS 6201 S. Emerald

April 4, 9 & 11 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 3&4

May 3, 8 & 10 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 6

May 15 & 17 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 7

May 22 & 24 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 9

May 31, June 5, 7,
12 & 14 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 10

DCFS 15115 Dixie Highway

April 4, 9 & 11 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m. 5

Module

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be licensed or re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.



COOK NORTH

May 12 (Sat)

May 19 (Sat)

June 2 (Sat)

April 7 (Sat)

June 2 (Sat)

Irish Center

9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Children's Home & Aid

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

COOK CENTRAL

June 2 (Sat)

Hephzibah

9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

COOK SOUTH

April 19 & 24 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

May 5 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

May 23 & June 2 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

DCFS Harvey Area

April 19 & 24 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

May 5 (Sat) 9:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

May 23 & June 2 (Mon/Wed) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

June 5 & 7 (Tues/Thurs) 6:30-9:30 p.m.